

**Skipping XMas in Clarens
December 2009**



Lemon Meringue Ice Cream Cake

I said 'skipping XMas' - not skipping 'pleasure!'

Thursday, 24 December 2009

We arrived in Clarens, Free State, around 1pm. It's about 3-4 hours' drive from Gauteng. With most places fully booked or asking ridiculous high prices, we found Lake Clarens self-catering. Years ago we spend a weekend at the Lake Clarens Guesthouse and enjoyed it immensely.



The selfcatering unit or 'annex 5 & 6' as they call it, is quite big inside. 2 Bedrooms with queen-sized beds (1 en-suite), open plan lounge and dining room with 2 more single beds in the lounge area. Square-sized kitchen with table and another bathroom. Lovely old sewing machines are on wooden armoires, even a small one (Hein said for underwear.) We chose the en-suite bedroom,



which proved to be a not-so-good-choice. The shower didn't work properly.

Outside, down a few steps, is a typical English garden. Roses and other flowers all mixed up – absolutely lovely!! A big lawn with a lovely old tree and a braai - made from a wheel rim. (*photo shown later*)

With our 2 crates for clothes & kitchen stuff, we sometimes load shirts and tops hangers-and-all in the car. Packing them in wardrobes are then quick-quick.



Driving into town, we drove around the town square and parked at Clementine's Restaurant (photo top left). *Years ago, we were sitting inside the restaurant, when a lady parked outside in a Cabriolet Audi. She was quite fetching and stepped out of the car with a glass of white wine! It made such an impression on Hein and myself.*

Wolfgang, the owner, sat outside on the patio and greeted us warmly and with a very firm handshake. Of course, a cold beer first. When the waiter brought Wolfgang's lunch, Hein ordered the same. Grilled fish with mash & veggies (photo top centre). I ordered steamed asparagus with salmon & Hollandaise sauce (photo top right). And some seed bread. It was lovely!

Before I ordered my lunch, I saw 'orange and ginger flan' on the dessert menu, but of course! It wasn't in stock. When the waitress showed me the dessert menu again after lunch, I decided on a 'lemon meringue ice cream cake'. *(Photo at beginning of review)* Gosh it was good! Tasted just like a lemon meringue, but all frozen up. Yum.



After a nap, we read some and then Hein started the fire. It was lovely outside. You could see the mountains through the garden trees. The wind started up a bit later and realising dinner won't be prepared on the fire, we showered and ducked into town.

Vito's Italian Restaurant looked cosy, so we stopped. The benefit of being a party of 2 is that a table can be arranged very quickly.

With a festive pre-XMas feeling all around, people were laughing, taking photos and having a merry time. Crackers were on the table and we ordered tiny bottles of wine. A red wine for Hein, Rose for me – but mine was quite 'sour', so I just added loads of ice. With both in the mood for pasta, we decided to share snails and a small

garlic-mozzarella focaccia bread as starters. It was absolutely lovely and the Rose wine tasted quite good with the food.

Hein decided on penne with a tomato, bacon & chilli sauce. I also had penne with a creamy tomato and veg sauce. Both pastas were superb! But we only managed half portions ...

With no space for coffees or dessert, we retired to bed.

Friday, 25 December 2009

Carrying our coffee and camping chairs onto the lawn, we enjoyed the fresh morning smell. Wet grass, flowers and birds singing. We exchanged gifts a few weeks earlier. I bought Hein a set of '24' DVD's – we watched it one whole weekend.

(The story of 24 is presented in the semblance of [real time](#). Each season depicts a 24-hour period in the life of [Jack Bauer](#) (played by Kiefer Sutherland), who works with the United States government as it fights fictitious terrorist threats to the United States. Bauer is often in the field for the [Los Angeles Counter Terrorist Unit \(CTU\)](#) as it tries to safeguard the nation from terrorist threats. The show also follows the actions of associated CTU agents, government officials and terrorists).

With the DVD's, we could watch the whole 'Season 1' together - and we were absolutely spellbound for the whole 24 hours!

When Hein was in London a few weeks ago, he bought me perfume at duty-free – Coco Chanel. Mmmmm, so spoilt.

After phoning our families, Hein started the fire. Boerewors of course. When we shopped for groceries the previous day at the small supermarket, Hein found this divine pepper relish! Filled with green chopped-up chillies.

After breakfast, we realised one of the guys washed our car. We gave the other roll & boerewors and some home-baked banana bread to him.



We were ready for ... Golden Gate National Park. With a friendly guard at the entrance, we signed in and gave him some Oreos cookies. *The Golden Gate National Park is a **Free State Game Reserve** located in the north eastern part of Free State and derives its name from the brilliant shades of gold cast by the sun on the sandstone cliffs, especially the imposing Brandwag rock.*



Not even photos do justice to the absolute beauty of the sandstone cliffs. Although we drove around for a few hours, we couldn't see any wild, except baboons.

While driving and gazing at the cliffs, a movement caught my eye. Stopping to look through the binoculars, we were amazed to see white goats under an overhanging



cliff, right at the top of a mountain. Too far for our camera, we just shook our heads in wonder.

Back at the house, we had pastrami and turkey rolls with cheese and coffee for lunch. Later the afternoon Hein lit the fire. With no wind threatening the flames, we had a lovely steak and spare ribs with veg for dinner. Followed by a heavy downpour of rain.

Saturday, 26 December 2009

Sipping our coffee on the patio, my eyes focused on arum lilies – green on the outside, white on the inside. I have a soft spot for arum lilies – when we grew up on a farm, arum lilies were wild in the veld. They just have such an understated elegance to them.



After a bath shower, we stopped at the 'Valley Cats' coffee shop in Clarens for breakfast. Lovely shop filled with jams, honey, sweets and relishes. We took a table outside and ordered. My cappuccino arrived in cinnamon splendour!



Sipping our drinks, a small German child engaged Hein in play. In-between the cats played with little plastic cones, but scattered before the child. With table numbers stuck to a little toy with Prestik (*re-usable putty-like adhesive*), I was the receiver of small amounts of Prestik pulled off. Then Hein stuck the number to his knee and the child mimicked it perfectly. It was sooo funny.

Hein's scrambled eggs and bacon on Panini looked good. My choice was a bit too saucy – bacon, blue cheese, onion marmalade and mayonnaise in a wrap. They should have left out the mayo.

I walked all around town, browsing through every little shop. But didn't find anything I wanted to buy.

We drove to Fouriesburg (about 25 km from Clarens), a town just before Ficksburg (*where the cherry festival happens annually*). Lovely old sandstone houses and buildings, but really just a small town.

Back in Clarens, we visited the Street Café for a burger. Sitting on the covered patio, we had a lovely time watching by-passers through a light rain. Loads of overseas tourists, but no hunks or gorgeous gals.

Reading our books, we passed a quiet afternoon. No napping.

Wanting to leave early the next morning, I decided on a chilli-mince pot with Portuguese bread for dinner. Squeezing sausage meat out of the casing, I mixed it with a tin of butter beans, tin of green beans and a tin of tomatoes. Added a small tin of tomato paste, salt, pepper and 2 heaped tablespoons of pepper-chilli relish. It simmered for a while and was absolutely lovely with the heated-up bread. Though a bit fierce in taste, we drank milk and had some more.

Sunday, 27 December 2009

After a quick cup of coffee outside, we packed, showered and drove off. In Bethlehem we stopped at the Wimpy for a quick breakfast and milky coffee and arrived back home just after 11.

Unpacked, loaded some washing and when we joined our cats on the bed for a nap, Hein embraced his pillow, whispered sweet nothings to it and promised to take it along next time.



Although exploring is in our blood, it's always nice to be back home again.

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